

Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

US shoppers find some groceries scarce due to virus, weather

By D. DURBIN/P. PURIFOY
AP Business Writer

Benjamin Whitely headed to a Safeway supermarket in Washington D.C. on Tuesday to grab some items for dinner. But he was disappointed to find the vegetable bins barren and a sparse selection of turkey, chicken and milk. "Seems like I missed out on everything," Whitely, 67, said. "I'm going to have to hunt around for stuff now." Shortages at U.S. grocery stores have grown more acute in recent weeks as new problems — like the fast-spreading omicron variant and severe weather — have piled on to the supply chain struggles and labor shortages that have plagued retailers since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The shortages are widespread, impacting produce and meat as well as packaged goods such as cereal. And they're being reported nationwide. U.S. groceries typically have 5% to 10% of their items out of stock at any given time; right now, that unavailability rate is hovering around 15%, according to Consumer Brands Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman. Part of the scarcity consumers are seeing on store shelves is due to pandemic trends that never abated — and are exacerbated by omicron. Americans are eating at home more than they used to, especially since offices and some schools remain closed. The average U.S. household spent \$144 per week at the grocery last



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year, according to FMI, a trade organization for groceries and food producers.

That was down from the peak of \$161 in 2020, but still far above the \$113.50

that households spent in 2019.

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US shoppers find some groceries scarce due to virus, weather

Continued from Front

A deficit of truck drivers that started building before the pandemic also remains a problem. The American Trucking Associations said in October that the U.S. was short an estimated 80,000 drivers, a historic high.

And shipping remains delayed, impacting everything from imported foods to packaging that is printed overseas.

Retailers and food producers have been adjusting to those realities since early 2020, when panic buying at the start of the pandemic sent the industry into a tailspin.

Many retailers are keeping more supplies of things like toilet paper on hand, for example, to avoid acute shortages.

"All of the players in the supply chain ecosystem have gotten to a point where they have that playbook

and they're able to navigate that baseline level of challenges," said Jessica Dankert, vice president of supply chain at the Retail Industry Leaders Association, a trade group.

Generally, the system works; Dankert notes that bare shelves have been a rare phenomenon over the last 20 months. It's just that additional complications have stacked up on that baseline at the moment, she said.

As it has with staffing at hospitals, schools and offices, the omicron variant has taken a toll on food production lines. Sean Connolly, the president and CEO of Conagra Brands, which makes Birds Eye frozen vegetables, Slim Jim meat snacks and other products, told investors last week that supplies from the company's U.S. plants will be constrained for at least the next month due to omi-

cron-related absences.

Worker illness is also impacting grocery stores. Stew Leonard Jr. is president and CEO of Stew Leonard's, a supermarket chain that operates stores in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Last week, 8% of his workers - around 200 people - were either out sick or in quarantine. Usually, the level of absenteeism is more like 2%.

One store bakery had so many people out sick that it dropped some of its usual items, like apple crumb cake. Leonard says meat and produce suppliers have told him they are also dealing with omicron-related worker shortages.

Still, Leonard says he is generally getting shipments on time, and thinks the worst of the pandemic may already be over.

Weather-related events, from snowstorms in the Northeast to wildfires in

Colorado, also have impacted product availability and caused some shoppers to stock up more than usual, exacerbating supply problems caused by the pandemic.

Lisa DeLima, a spokesperson for Mom's Organic Market, an independent grocer with locations in the mid-Atlantic region, said the company's stores did not have produce to stock last weekend because winter weather halted trucks trying to get from Pennsylvania to Washington.

That bottleneck has since been resolved, DeLima said. In her view, the intermittent dearth of certain items shoppers see now are nothing compared to the more chronic shortages at the beginning of the pandemic.

"People don't need to panic buy," she said. "There's plenty of product to be had. It's just taking a little

longer to get from point A to point B."

Experts are divided on how long grocery shopping will sometimes feel like a scavenger hunt.

Dankert thinks this is a hiccup, and the country will soon settle back to more normal patterns, albeit with continuing supply chain headaches and labor shortages.

"You're not going to see long-term outages of products, just sporadic, isolated incidents — that window where it takes a minute for the supply chain to catch up," she said.

But others aren't so optimistic.

Freeman, of the Consumer Brands Association, says omicron-related disruptions could expand as the variant grips the Midwest, where many big packaged food companies like Kellogg Co. and General Mills Inc. have operations. □



Associated Press

By **LINDSEY TANNER**
AP Medical Writer

Suspicion, misinformation, complacency and delays because of the holidays and bad weather have combined to produce alarmingly low COVID-19 vaccination rates in U.S. children ages 5 to 11, authorities say.

As of Tuesday, just over

17% were fully vaccinated, more than two months after shots for the age group became available. While Vermont is at 48%, California is just shy of 19% and Mississippi is only at 5%.

Vaccinations among the elementary school set surged after the shots were introduced in the fall, but the numbers have crept

Kids' low COVID-19 vaccination rates called a 'gut punch'

up slowly since then, and omicron's explosive spread appears to have had little effect.

The low rates are "very disturbing," said Dr. Robert Murphy, executive director for the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. "It's just amazing."

Parents who hesitate "are taking an enormous risk and continuing to fuel the pandemic," Murphy said.

Hospitalizations of children under 18 with COVID-19 in the U.S. have climbed to their highest levels on record in the past few weeks. The low vaccination rates and rising hospitalizations are "a gut punch, especial-

ly when we've been working so hard to keep these kids well," said Dr. Natasha Burgert, a pediatrician in Overland Park, Kansas.

The vaccines have proved highly safe and effective at reducing the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death.

Overall, 63% of Americans are fully vaccinated. Among children 12 to 17, the rate is 54%.

COVID-19 shots for young children have been authorized in at least 12 countries. In Canada, where Pfizer shots were cleared for ages 5 to 11 in November, just 2% are fully vaccinated.

Snowstorms, tornadoes and other heavy weather in December are believed

to have slowed the pace of vaccination in the U.S., along with the busy holiday season. Still, many parents have other concerns.

Chicago mother Kendra Shaw has resisted shots for her two school-age children, saying she worries about possible risks and isn't convinced the benefits are worth it.

But this week, her 10-year-old daughter pleaded to get vaccinated so she wouldn't miss school, and her soon-to-be 7-year-old son asked for his shots so he could have a big birthday party.

Shaw scheduled their first doses for Wednesday but said: "I'm really on the fence." □

Old Florida Keys bridge reopens to pedestrians, bicyclists

MARATHON, Fla. (AP) — A segment of a 110-year-old Florida Keys bridge reopened to pedestrians and bicyclists on Wednesday following a \$44 million restoration project.

Rehabilitation construction on the off-photographed 2.2-mile (3.5-km) span of the Old Seven Mile Bridge began in late 2017.

"What made the project challenging was that it is a historic bridge, and we had to restore the bridge to the same aesthetic fabric as the original," said project manager Tony Sabbag, a Florida Department of Transportation contractor.

Nicknamed "Old Seven," the bridge was completed in 1912 as part of Henry Flagler's Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad that connected the Keys with each other and mainland Florida. The span is the gateway to historic Pigeon Key, a tiny island beneath it that once housed 400 railroad construction workers.

In 1938, the railroad bridge was converted to carry automobiles. In 1982, the new Seven Mile Bridge, actually 6.79 miles (10.9 kilometers) long, debuted alongside the historic one, whose steel swing span that facilitated marine traffic between the

Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico was removed.

The retired "Old Seven" became a popular recreation area and appeared in several films including "True Lies," a 1994 action-comedy starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis.

Wednesday's ribbon-cutting ceremony was the crowning moment of a 30-year, \$77 million agreement inked in 2013 between Monroe County, the City of Marathon and the Florida Department of Transportation. That agreement funded restoration and maintenance to pre-



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serve the iconic landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"The Old Seven Mile Bridge is important to the Keys, the history of the Keys and a viaduct to get to Pigeon Key," said Monroe County

Administrator Roman Gastesi.

Restoration included structural steel and bridge joint system repairs, new decking, pedestrian and bicycle handrails and other enhancements. □



Associated Press

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation jumped at its fastest pace in nearly 40 years last month, a 7% spike from a year earlier that is increasing household expenses, eating into wage gains and heaping pressure on President Joe Biden and the Federal Reserve to address what has become the biggest threat to the U.S. economy.

Prices have risen sharply for cars, gas, food and furniture as part of a rapid recovery from the pandemic recession that was fueled by vast infusions of government aid and emergency intervention by the Fed, which slashed interest rates. As Americans have ramped up spending, supply chains have been squeezed by shortages of workers and raw materials.

"Inflation ended 2021 very hot," said Ben Ayers, senior

economist at Nationwide. Ayers and other economists say prices may cool off some as snags in the supply chain ease, but inflation will remain elevated throughout 2022.

The Labor Department reported Wednesday that its measure of inflation that excludes volatile food and gas prices jumped 5.5% in December, the fastest such increase since 1991. Inflation rose 0.5% overall from November, down from 0.8% the previous month.

Nicole Pomije, a bakery owner in Minnesota, said she is increasing prices for her cookies because of surging costs for butter and other ingredients.

Her basic cookies were priced at 99 cents each, while premium versions such as white chocolate were selling for \$1.50 each. But Pomije said she will have to bump up the prices of her basic cookies to

US inflation soared 7% in past year, the most since 1982

the premium price.

"We have to make money," she said. "We are a business. We don't want to lose our customers. But I think we might."

Rising prices have wiped out the healthy pay increases that many Americans have been receiving, making it harder for households, especially lower-income families, to afford basic expenses. Polls show that inflation has started displacing even the coronavirus as a public concern, making clear the political threat it poses to President Biden and congressional Democrats.

A significant portion of inflation is still being driven by pandemic-driven mismatches between demand and supply. Used car prices have soared more than 37% over the past year because new car production has been limited by shortages of semiconductors. New car prices jumped 1% in December and have soared 11.8% in the past year.

Clothing costs rose 1.7% just in December, its second month of sharp increases, and are up 5.8% from a year ago.

There was some relief last month. Gas prices dropped

0.5% in December, yet they are still 50% higher than a year ago.

Most economists expect inflation to moderate once the omicron wave fades and as Americans shift more of their spending to services such as travel, eating out and movie-going. That would reduce the demand for goods and help clear supply chains, which are showing some signs of untangling.

In recent weeks, shortages and higher prices have cropped up at U.S. grocery stores. The omicron variant and severe weather have compounded labor and supply-chain problems.

Many restaurants have been passing along higher labor and food costs onto their customers. Darden Restaurants, the company that owns Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse and other chains, said it increased prices by 2 percent at the end of last year and expects to bump them by another 4 percent over the next six months.

Darden CEO Gene Lee recently told investors recently that this is "the toughest inflationary environment we've seen in years."

On Tuesday, Chair Jerome Powell told Congress that

if it becomes necessary to fight high inflation more aggressively, the Federal Reserve is prepared to accelerate the interest rate hikes it plans to begin this year. Fed officials have estimated that they will raise their benchmark short-term rate, now pegged near zero, three times this year.

Those rate increases would likely increase borrowing costs for home and auto purchases as well as for business loans, potentially slowing the economy. The Fed is also ending its monthly bond purchases, which were intended to lower longer-term interest rates to encourage borrowing and spending.

The Fed's pivot hasn't quelled questions from economists and some senators about whether the Fed has acted too slowly to end its ultra-low-interest rate policies in the face of accelerating inflation.

In his testimony to Congress on Tuesday, Powell said the Fed mistakenly believed that supply chain bottlenecks that have helped drive up the prices of goods wouldn't last nearly as long as they have. Once the supply chains were unsharled, he said, prices would come back down. □

Biden redoubling focus on testing amid shortages, confusion



Associated Press

By **ZEKE MILLER**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is redoubling its efforts to expand supply and accessibility of COVID-19 testing as it faces mounting criticism over long lines and supply shortages for testing nationwide and confusion about when to get tested amid the omicron surge. The White House announced Wednesday that a dedicated stream of 5 million rapid tests and 5

million lab-based PCR tests will be made available to schools starting this month to ease supply shortages and promote the safe reopening of schools. It said Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, will join the COVID-19 team to oversee the enhanced testing push. The moves come just days before private insurers will be required to reimburse Americans for tests and

the launch of a new federal website for Americans to order free tests to be shipped to their doors. The test supply push, though, will likely be too late for many Americans trying to safely navigate the omicron-fueled case surge, which is already showing signs of cresting. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on Wednesday offered guidance for when Americans should use tests — which were in short supply as Americans traveled and saw family during the busy holiday season. "Americans should take a test when they have symptoms that appear to be COVID-19," she said, including fever, cough, sore throat, respiratory symptoms and muscle aches. She also said they should test after known exposure to the virus, generally five days after being exposed, or earlier as part of test-to-stay protocols in schools

and workplaces. "Certainly if you're going to gather with family, if you're going to a gathering where people are immunocompromised or where they're elderly or where you have people who might be unvaccinated or poorly protected from a vaccine that might be an opportunity you want to test," she added. The school testing initiative announced Wednesday comes after the nation's third-largest public school system, in Chicago, closed for days after an impasse between teachers and officials over reopening policies. The closure was a black eye for President Joe Biden, who made reopening schools — and keeping them open — a priority. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said students need to be in their classrooms and the announcement shows the administration's commitment to helping schools stay open. "We're doing everything

we can to make sure that our children have an opportunity to stay in school," Cardona said Wednesday on "CBS Mornings." "That's where they need to be, and we know we can do it safely." States are applying to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the tests, Cardona said, adding that he expected distribution to begin as early as next week. "We recognize that schools are the hubs of the community" and they should be open for instruction, the secretary added, saying it is "vital for our students." "We have been very clear, publicly and privately, that we want to see schools open," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday. She cited the massive amount of funding for schools as evidence of the administration ensuring "we were prepared and had resources needed to address whatever may come up in the pandemic." □

US airlines say China is forcing them to cancel some flights

By **DAVID KOENIG**
AP Airlines Writer

U.S. airlines say China has blocked more than a dozen recent and future flights from entering the country, which has been tightening already-strict COVID-19 travel restrictions. China ordered the cancellations after some passengers tested positive for COVID-19 on flights that arrived in China in late December, according to industry officials. American Airlines said Tuesday that six of its flights from Dallas-Fort Worth to Shanghai in late January and early February have been canceled. United Airlines said it was forced to cancel six flights from San Francisco to Shanghai later this month. Delta Air Lines said it canceled one flight last week and another this Friday to Shanghai. Airlines for America, which represents the largest U.S. passenger and cargo carriers, said it was discussing the matter with U.S. and



Associated Press

Chinese government officials to find ways to minimize the impact on travelers. The Biden administration had no immediate comment. The blocking of flights is the latest development in a dispute between the two countries over international

flights and rules designed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. China has been ratcheting up travel restrictions after recent outbreaks of COVID-19 as it prepares to host the Winter Olympics in early February. China limits capacity on inbound flights

— currently to 75% — and requires passengers to be tested before departure and after arriving in the country. If passengers test positive, the airline that carried them can be forced to cancel two to four flights, depending on the number

of positive cases. Last month, Delta said new requirements for cleaning planes between flights caused a plane bound for Shanghai to return to Seattle. The airline said the new rules extended the time planes would need to sit on the ground in Shanghai, and weren't workable. The Chinese consulate in San Francisco lodged a protest over Delta's decision. In 2020, the Trump administration backed down from a threat to block four Chinese airlines after China agreed to let United and Delta resume limited operations that were shuttered earlier in the pandemic. Last August, the U.S. Transportation Department limited the number of passengers on four Chinese airlines' flights to the U.S. after China imposed similar limits on United Airlines. The U.S. said China was putting an unreasonable burden on U.S. airlines for travelers who test positive after arriving in China. □

China's Tianjin orders more testing of 14 million residents

BEIJING (AP) — The northern Chinese city of Tianjin ordered a second round of COVID-19 testing of all 14 million residents Wednesday following the discovery of 97 cases of the omicron variant during initial screenings that began Sunday. Residents were asked to remain where they are until the results of all the nucleic acid tests are received, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Xinhua said authorities have carried out almost 12 million tests so far, with 7.8 million samples returned. Infections were first reported on Saturday in the city that is only about an hour from Beijing, which is to host the Winter Olympics from Feb. 4.

High-speed rail service and other forms of transportation between the cities have been suspended, leading to some disruptions in supply chains, including for packaged food items sold in convenience stores. Tianjin's COVID-19 prevention and control office said all who have tested positive in the initial testing round were found to have the omicron variant, of which China has so far only reported a small number of cases. The source of the outbreak is still unknown and many who are spreading the variant may be doing so unwittingly because



they show no symptoms. Also in the north, two college students who traveled earlier this month by train from Tianjin tested positive for the virus Wednesday in the city of Dalian, city officials said. There was no word on what variant they had contracted.

The omicron variant spreads even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who are vaccinated or were previously infected by other versions of the virus. However, early studies show omicron is less likely to cause severe illness

than the delta variant, and vaccination and a booster still offer strong protection from serious illness, hospitalization and death.

Millions more Chinese are under lockdown in cities under the strict "dynamic zero-case policy" that has allowed China to largely contain major outbreaks, although at considerable cost to local economies. Hong Kong has closed kindergartens and primary schools after infections were discovered among students, banned flights from the United States and seven other countries and held 2,500 passengers on a cruise ship for coronavi-

rus testing Wednesday as the city attempts to stem the emerging omicron outbreak.

Hong Kong has tightened pandemic-related restrictions in recent days after discovering the omicron variant had spread beyond people arriving from overseas.

In total, China announced 166 new cases of COVID-19 in the 24 hours before Wednesday, including 33 in Tianjin and 118 in Henan province but just eight in the city of Xi'an, home to the famed Terracotta Warrior statues and major industries, where a lockdown was imposed Dec. 23.

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Authorities also released news of an inspection to Henan last week by Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, who called for stepped-up measures to prevent the spread of both the delta and omicron variants.

COVID-19 has spread to three cities in the province, including Yuzhou, Anyang and the provincial capital Zhengzhou, prompting travel bans and various levels of lockdown.

"It is necessary to do a good job in guaranteeing the living needs of the people in the closed and controlled communities, ensure the basic medical needs of the people during the epidemic period, and ensure that the people's demands can be responded to and resolved in a timely manner," Sun was quoted as saying. Some Xi'an residents have complained about their inability to obtain food and other daily necessities.

China has sacked or otherwise punished a number of officials for dereliction of duty related to the pandemic response, including failing to prevent new infections.

On Wednesday, Anyang authorities cited 61 government departments and 11 officials in violation. Punishments ranged from verbal warnings to dismissal, according to a city government notice. □

Swiss cut self-isolation, quarantine times as omicron rises

GENEVA (AP) — Switzerland's government is halving the self-isolation times required of people who test positive for the coronavirus and the quarantine times required of people they were in contact with, to five days.

The Federal Council, the seven-member executive branch of Swiss government, made the decision Wednesday and in a statement noted intensive-care admissions are lower in the pandemic since the emergence of the omicron variant worldwide over the last two months.

The decision to shorten the isolation and quarantine periods, from 10 days previously, results from shorter times between infection and transmission of omicron compared to earlier variants, the government said. The ability of Swiss regions to trace contacts has come under increased pressure as case counts, and thus people affected by isolation and quarantine, has risen sharply.

"The epidemiological situation is critical and remains difficult to assess: Hospital admissions and occupancy of intensive care

units have fallen in recent weeks despite a surge in the number of cases," the government said.

However, the council cautioned that while omicron is less dangerous for vaccinated and recovered people, a surge in hospitalizations in the country is still expected given a huge spike in case counts and an increase in positive tests among people admitted to hospital "even though they were not admitted due to COVID-19."

That requires isolating more people, which makes care in hospital more complex,

and threatens to sideline more staff members who test positive too, it said.

Bracing for possible staff shortages, the eastern Swiss region of Graubünden on Wednesday said it could order any trained nurses and some other health care specialists who are not currently practicing to go to work if hospitalizations surge. It cited a clause of Swiss law allowing for such a mandatory call-up in health emergencies. Trained personnel at higher risk of severe COVID such as the elderly would be exempt.

The federal council, meanwhile, said it too could "act swiftly" if necessary by closing businesses or institutions and capping attendance at public events, as it has done repeatedly in the past during the ebb and flow of the pandemic.

The country of about 8.5 million people reported more than 32,000 cases of COVID-19 over the last 24 hours, among the highest figures it has recorded during the pandemic. A total of 16 people died of COVID-related causes over the last day, raising the total death toll to 12,047. □

Omicron may be headed for a rapid drop in Britain, US

By **MARIA CHENG and CARLA K. JOHNSON** Associated Press

Scientists are seeing signals that COVID-19's alarming omicron wave may have peaked in Britain and is about to do the same in the U.S., at which point cases may start dropping off dramatically.

The reason: The variant has proved so wildly contagious that it may already be running out of people to infect, just a month and a half after it was first detected in South Africa.

"It's going to come down as fast as it went up," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

At the same time, experts warn that much is still uncertain about how the next phase of the pandemic might unfold. The plateauing or ebbing in the two countries is not happening everywhere at the same time or at the same pace. And weeks or months of misery still lie ahead for patients and overwhelmed hospitals even if the drop-off comes to pass.

"There are still a lot of people who will get infected as we descend the slope on the backside," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, director of the University of Texas COVID-19 Modeling Consortium, which predicts that reported cases will peak



Associated Press

within the week.

On Tuesday, Janet Woodcock, the acting head of the Food and Drug Administration, told Congress that the highly transmissible strain will infect "most people" and that the focus should turn to ensuring critical services can continue uninterrupted.

"I think it's hard to process what's actually happening right now, which is: Most people are going to get COVID, all right?," she said. "What we need to do is make sure the hospitals can still function, transportation, other essential services are not disrupted while this happens."

The University of Washington's own highly influential

model projects that the number of daily reported cases in the U.S. will crest at 1.2 million by Jan. 19 and will then fall sharply "simply because everybody who could be infected will be infected," according to Mokdad.

In fact, he said, by the university's complex calculations, the true number of new daily infections in the U.S. is an estimate that includes people who were never tested. It has already peaked, hitting 6 million on Jan. 6. In Britain, meanwhile, new COVID-19 cases dropped to about 140,000 a day in the last week, after skyrocketing to more than 200,000 a day earlier this month, according to gov-

ernment data.

Kevin McConway, a retired professor of applied statistics at Britain's Open University, said that while COVID-19 cases are still rising in places such as southwest England and the West Midlands, the outbreak may have peaked in London.

The figures have raised hopes that the two countries are about to undergo something similar to what happened in South Africa, where in the span of about a month the wave crested at record highs and then fell significantly.

"We are seeing a definite falling-off of cases in the U.K., but I'd like to see them fall much further before we know if what happened in

South Africa will happen here," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at Britain's University of East Anglia.

Dr. David Heymann, who previously led the World Health Organization's infectious diseases department, said Britain was "the closest to any country of being out of the pandemic," adding that COVID-19 was inching towards becoming endemic.

Differences between Britain and South Africa, including Britain's older population and the tendency of its people to spend more time indoors in the winter, could mean a bumpier outbreak for the country and other nations like it.

On the other hand, British authorities' decision to adopt minimal restrictions against omicron could enable the virus to rip through the population and run its course much faster than it might in Western European countries that have imposed tougher COVID-19 controls, such as France, Spain and Italy.

Shabir Mahdi, dean of health sciences at South Africa's University of Witwatersrand, said European countries that impose lockdowns won't necessarily come through the omicron wave with fewer infections; the cases may just be spread out over a longer period of time. □

Anti-vaccine protesters try to storm Bulgarian parliament

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — Protesters opposing COVID-19 restrictions in Bulgaria clashed Wednesday with police as they tried to storm the Parliament in the capital of Sofia.

A heavy police presence prevented protesters from entering the building and some were detained. Several people, including police officers, were injured during the clashes.

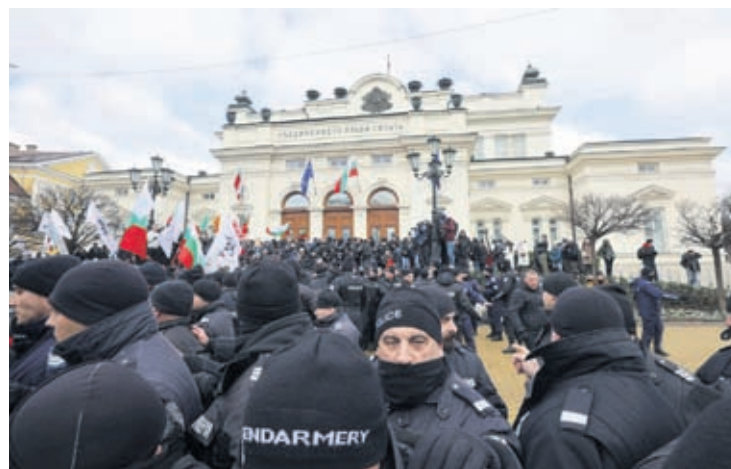
Eventually, the protesters were pushed back and police cordoned off the building.

The violence erupted at a protest rally against mask

and vaccine mandates organized by a nationalist group that is fiercely opposing the Bulgarian gov-

ernment's anti-epidemic measures.

"The aim of the protest is to remove the restrictive mea-



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sures and especially, first of all, the unconstitutional green certificate," Kostadin Kostadinov, leader of the Vazrazhdane party, said ahead of the protest.

The nationalist group, which holds 13 seats in Parliament's 240-seat chamber, has won support among opponents of coronavirus restrictions.

The nearly 1,000 protesters, who waved national flags and sang patriotic songs, remained at the square in front of the National Assembly, saying they planned to stay there until their demands for abolishing the

mandatory face masks and green vaccination status passes are met.

Bulgaria, which is facing a new surge in infections, is the least vaccinated country in the 27-member European Union, with only a third of its population fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Speaking from his home, where he is quarantined for contacts with an infected person, Prime Minister Kiril Petkov called for calm and invited representatives of the protesters to his office on Friday to discuss their demands. □



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10 years later, Costa Concordia disaster vivid for survivors

By **TRISHA THOMAS and NI-COLE WINFIELD** Associated Press

GIGLIO, Italy (AP) — Ten years may have passed since the Costa Concordia cruise ship slammed into a reef and capsized off this Tuscan island. But for the passengers on board and the residents who welcomed them ashore, the memories of that harrowing, freezing night remain minute-to-minute vivid.

The dinner plates that flew off the tables when the hull first slammed into the rocks. The blackout after the ship's engine room flooded and generators failed. The final mad scramble to evacuate the listing liner and then the extraordinary generosity of Giglio islanders who offered shoes, sweat-shirts and shelter until the sun rose and passengers were ferried to the mainland. Italy on Thursday is marking the 10th anniversary of the Concordia disaster with a daylong commemoration that will end with a candlelit vigil near the moment the ship hit the reef: 9:45 p.m. on Jan. 13, 2012. The events will honor the 32 people who died that night, the 4,200 survivors, but also the residents of Giglio who took in passengers



and crew and then lived with the Concordia carcass for another two years until it was righted and hauled away for scrap.

"For us islanders, when we remember some event, we always refer to whether it was before or after the Concordia," said Matteo Coppa, who was 23 and out fishing on the jetty when the darkened Concordia listed toward shore and then collapsed onto its side.

"I imagine it like a nail stuck

to the wall that marks that date, as a before and after," he said, recounting how he joined the rescue effort that night helping pull ashore the dazed, injured and freezing passengers from lifeboats.

The anniversary comes as the cruise industry, shut down in much of the world for months because of the coronavirus pandemic, is once again in the spotlight because of COVID-19 outbreaks threatening passenger safety. The U.S.

Centers for Disease Control last month warned people across-the-board not to go on cruises, regardless of their vaccination status, because of the risk of infection. For Concordia survivor Georgia Ananias, the COVID-19 infections are just the latest evidence that passenger safety still isn't a top priority for the industry. Passengers aboard the Concordia were largely left on their own to find life jackets and a functioning lifeboat after the captain steered

the ship close too shore in a stunt. He then delayed an evacuation order until it was too late, with lifeboats unable to lower because the ship was listing too much.

"I always said this will not define me, but you have no choice," Ananias said in an interview from her home in Los Angeles, Calif. "We all suffer from PTSD. We had a lot of guilt that we survived and 32 other people died." Prosecutors blamed the delayed evacuation order and conflicting instructions given by crew for the chaos that ensued as passengers scrambled to get off the ship. The captain, Francesco Schettino, is serving a 16-year prison sentence for manslaughter, causing a shipwreck and abandoning a ship before all the passengers and crew had evacuated.

Ananias and her family declined Costa's initial \$14,500 compensation offered to each passenger and sued Costa, a unit of U.S.-based Carnival Corp., to try to cover the cost of their medical bills and therapy for the post-traumatic stress they have suffered. But after eight years in the U.S. and then Italian court system, they lost their case. □

Monkey business: Antwerp zoo put kids at ease for virus jab



Associated Press

ANTWERP, Belgium (AP) — The Belgian city of Antwerp has put its faith in monkey business to put kids at ease for their first COVID-19 jab. With the expansion of the country's vaccination campaign to include children as young as 5, Belgian authorities are getting creative as they try to prevent kids getting spooked by the sight of vials and needles.

Antwerp on Wednesday made use of one its greatest assets the zoo in the center of town which is one of the finest in Europe. While adult vaccination centers focus on the conveyor belt principle to process as many people in as short a time as possible, it takes more patience with kids.

Close to the zoo's entrance, specially designed safari

tents were set up, with photos of zoo animals. To distract them inside the tent, kids were given light pointers to seek out the animals they liked best while they got their shot.

If there was any pain, it quickly dissipated when they and their parents were allowed to stroll through the zoo's greenhouse and visit the monkey enclosure. □

LOCAL



Heintje Ras breaks world record by spending 100 days in an underground phosphate mine

ORANJESTAD – On January 10, 2022, in the presence of a multitude, Heintje Ras made history by remaining in an underground phosphate mine for 100 days.

The Guinness World Records recognized this record. The objective of this accomplishment was to

raise funds and develop his local museum for the community and showcase the history of Aruba.

The government of Aruba awarded Ras with an achievement plaque for his determination to remain 100 days underground. What makes this achievement significant is that for

100 days, the community came together for a good cause, no matter political affiliation, and gave Heintje well-deserved support.

That is something positive during these difficult times of crisis and is proof that the community can come together for great causes. □

Malmok Boardwalk enters phase 3 in 2022

ORANJESTAD – The Minister of Tourism and Public Health has announced that the Malmok Boardwalk project will continue with phase 3.

The Malmok Boardwalk is a new boardwalk that runs along most of the Malmok beach strip and is used by many for leisure and sports. In addition to embellishing the area, it provides security to its users. According to the plans of the Ministry, ATA, Tourism Product Enhancement Fund TPEF, DOW, and the DIP, phase 3 will be starting at the beginning of 2022.

Phase 3 consists primarily of the embellishment of the entire project. It includes palm trees, colorful flowering plants, and more parking areas that will blend in with the natural aspects of the project. The Malmok Boardwalk was planned according to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

By 2022, there are many other projects planned to enhance our island, as tourism remains the main driver for our economy. □

Aruba to me



ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from **Cynthia MacLean** from Massachusetts, who is also Mrs. Massachusetts International 2022.

Cynthia has been coming to Aruba for 40 years. Cynthia sure has a lot to tell about her beloved island. Here are some highlights.

"For us Aruba has been a place to relax, unwind, and socialize with my friends and family. We enjoy the fabulous restaurants and being treated as royalty by the waitstaff. One of the changes over the years has been the expansion of the hotels and timeshares as well as the relocation of the downtown stores. The biggest change for me would be the closing of the Flame restaurant. We love making memories of our special life events in Aruba and i've worked with many of the photographers and beauty professionals and various photo shoots. Especially since I am currently Mrs. Massachusetts International 2022. □

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Paseo Herencia is always fun and exciting to visit

NOORD— Paseo Herencia offers a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment options in an outdoor center located in the heart of Palm Beach.

Shopping

The Paseo Herencia stores offer a great collection in beach wear, clothing, perfume, shoes, jewelry, souvenirs and much more. Pamper yourself by visiting Maggy's and enjoy their salon services and shop for your favorite beauty products. Aruba Aloe has that perfect gift to bring back home, all made with natural ingredients. Other brand favorites are Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Aldo, Carmen Steffens, Quiksilver, Pandora and many more.

Restaurants

Start with a breakfast meal at Chill Out Island Café for a fluffy souffle pancake with your choice of toppings, breakfast sandwiches or acai bowls plus your favorite bubble tea. TGI Fridays offers breakfast options starting from \$8.57, available all day – every day. Go Argentinian style at Che Bar and try their delicious omelet with chorizo/ham, mozzarella, onions, peppers, and tomatoes served with skillet potatoes and toast.

These restaurants are also open for lunch and dinner and will delight you with unique tastes. Choices run from Argentinian dishes to, Asian/Caribbean, International and Mexican at amongst others Iguana Cantina. Sip and have a good time at the Bulldog Aruba located in the cen-

ter of the Plaza. Open till 11pm.

VIP Cinema

Visit the one-of-a-kind Caribbean Cinemas VIP on the second floor of Paseo Herencia and enjoy your favorite movies with the latest projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound with a

delicious bag of popcorn.

Entertainment

Kids can enjoy the Paseo kids' activities, carousel & kiddie train, every day from 6pm to 10pm and do not forget to catch the nightly water shows at 7:30pm, 8:30pm and 9:30pm. Another fun activity is the The



Range Airsoft Experience located behind The Lazy Turtle. Snap Instagramable pictures at the Angel Wings located between Pandora and Quiksilver and another one in front of TGI Fridays. Catch a live Show on Friday by violinist Angela Flores and Saturday by the acrobatic group Ritmo Cubano at 8pm on the Plaza Padu.

Also with any purchase at

Paseo Herencia you will receive FREE parking in the parking garage. Paseo Herencia has implemented all COVID protocols according to the Aruba Health & Happiness code. It is required to wear face masks when shopping or visiting the mall to ensure a safe environment.

To learn more, visit the Paseo Herencia Facebook or Instagram page. □



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Update COVID-19 January 10, 2022

ORANJESTAD – Here is the latest update on the ongoing COVID situation in Aruba.

On January 12 2022, Aruba registered 575 new cases, of which 62 were non-residents. The number of active positive cases is 3.008, whereas the average daily cases over the past seven days total 793. The positivity rate stands at 64%.

Aruba in the fifth Wave:

In the first wave in March 2021, we reached 69 confirmed cases. The second wave in August 2020 registered 1630 confirmed cases. The third wave occurred at the end of 2020 and caused 700 confirmed cases but lasted longer. The fourth wave happened in July 2021 with 1076 registered cases, and the fifth wave started in December 2021.

Hospitalizations:

In August 2021, COVID-related hospitalizations reached an alarming level. The government imposed a curfew from 10:00 pm - 5:00 am. The hospital reached its full capacity and had no room to treat patients injured in car accidents. Consequently many patients were sent to Colombia for hospitalizations. During the 4th wave, the

hospital almost entered into Code Black (where there are not enough beds to treat patients), and drastic measures were needed to ease the surge.

This 5th wave does not require any drastic measures so far, as there are only 21 patients in the hospital of which three are in the ICU and 19 on the general ward.

According to the Prime Minister, the current situation at the hospital is under control. This is the indicator for the authorities whether to impose more or fewer measures.

The Prime Minister emphasized that they are constantly searching for the right balance between health-care and the economy.

The measures are as follows since of December 30, 2021

- Curfew: NO Curfew
- Closing Time: 12:00 am for all business for the exception of Casino's which can stay open till 1:00 am
- Restaurants: Max. 6 people per table.
- Social Activities and Sports: Max. people: 60 indoors, 75 outdoors.
- Funerals: Max. people: 75 (if the space is adequately large

enough)

- Area Ban 7:00 pm - 5:00 am
- Nightlife: Dancing is not permitted
- Entertainment: Max 5 musicians on stage.
- Gathering Ban: Max. 6 people.
- Shopping: 1 person per family

The following measures remain applicable:

- Masks: Use of masks is mandatory inside at all establishments.
- Alcohol: Ban of alcohol on public roads: 24 hours.
- Social Distancing: Continue maintaining social distance.

New isolation and quarantine guidelines

The Crisis Team, after thorough consideration of the different advice and analysis, has changed the isolation and quarantine guidelines. Once a person gets a positive SARS-CoV-2 test result, the person should isolate for five days and avoid contact with others in the household. The five days of isolation start on the date the person received the positive test result.

If after five days in isolation you still have symptoms, you must continue to isolate until you no longer have

symptoms. After 24 hours without any symptoms, the person should complete the form sent by email. Those living in the same house as the person who tested positive should quarantine for 5 days, starting on the day they had immediate contact with the person who tested positive and should wear masks at all times. The person who tested positive must inform others living in the same home about the positive test result. The isolation and quarantine protocols are included in the email sent to anyone who tests positive. Please be aware that the DVG will no longer contact those who tested positive or anyone living in the same household. The DVG urges those who tested positive to complete the form that sent by email and to provide information about everyone living in the same home that needs to quarantine.

Exceptions as of Jan 8, 2022

Persons that have received the booster shot (so all 3 vaccine shots) and persons that were infected with Covid within past 4 weeks no longer need to quarantine when a housemate tested positive. □

Aqua Grill restaurant: The taste of New England with Caribbean flair

ORANJESTAD — One thing is for certain: Chef Scott Scheuerman and his team are famous for getting people hooked, just like the fish on your plate. You will get the taste of home fused with Caribbean while dining in elegance. Scheuerman will tell how Aqua Grill established its name since opening in 2002, and why it reaped accolades from such prestigious travel publications as Fodor's, who says, "This hip restaurant is heaven on earth for seafood lovers, who will find fresh fish galore..." Now is your chance to taste Aqua Grill's NEW seasonal menu and create a lifetime culinary memory.

'A Scheuer thing'

Secretly, we all know that the success of a restaurant begins in the kitchen. That is where the chef creates his magic and for Aqua Grill the culinary team has won an assortment of awards for their continuous delivery of 'haute-cuisine del mar.'

Classic seafood is mingled with contemporary ideas resulting in surprising dishes that soon made the restaurant a must-dine, confirmed by established travel media specialists like Fodor's and Frommer's.

American-born Scheuerman, executive chef of Aqua Grill, is thrilled about 'his restaurant'. "We started out as a New England style seafood restaurant, patterned after Boston style. But we quickly blended into some Caribbean, local flair... if you will. We do still offer the traditional New England dishes like whole Maine lobster, northern seafood plates like the salmon, tuna and swordfish. We buy also from the local fisherman to offer Caribbean dishes like snapper and grouper which are number one sellers in our restaurant being the most prevalent local fishes. Catches like wahoo, mahi mahi and brasil are welcome too, anything that comes out of the water we embrace."

Fresh import from Boston Aqua Grill flies in their own shipments on a weekly basis mostly from Boston because the price quality balance is the best, says the chef. "We are unique in this. Number one priority is buying fresh, we mean not frozen. Our original concept is New England seafood and we stick to that concept. They have a wonderful assortment of oysters and lobsters as well." Aqua Grill also offers international fusion type of menu items; actually all you wish for is there. A very balanced menu awaits you. "And we have options for meat lovers and vegetarians/vegans too. We, however, do not mix it up too much because we believe we do not want to lose our identity as a seafood restaurant," Scheuerman adds.

Sublime menu

Now is the time to indulge in Aqua Grill's dinner experience. The established restaurant offers a sensational



menu. We present to you a Raw Bar with among others fresh Oysters on the half Shell, Littleneck Clams, Peruvian Ceviche and Lobster Salad. Steamed Dumplings and Prawns or Steamed Mussels seduce you from the open view kitchen. After that continue your gastronomic trip to heaven with the house specialties like Main Lobster, steamed or broiled or maybe you crave for the best Alaska King Crab Legs you have ever tasted? You haven't reached your destination yet because there are more main course options to blow you away: Seared Chilean Sea Bass, Cioppino or Blackened Tuba are just some to mention.

Take a pick out of Aqua Grill's delicious desserts to finally conclude yes, this beats it all. We will be back

for more.

About the place

The glow of Aqua Grill is obvious by entering the restaurant. The eclectic of a modern and a traditional New England fish house style appeal and the open-view kitchen adds to the thrill. It's clear as water; for sublime seafood in Aruba go to the island's premier seafood restaurant: Aqua Grill. This seafood-heaven place is already a statement for years with a consistency in upscale dining and top-shelf service. If you like to savor your seafood, this is your dive in. We promise you will get hooked. □

Aqua Grill

J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 374
Phone: +297-586-5900
Fax: +297-586-5901
Facebook – Instagram – website

Biogen tumbles after Medicare lays out Aduhelm coverage plan

By **TOM MURPHY**
AP Health Writer

Shares of Biogen slid Wednesday, a day after federal regulators slapped coverage limitations on the drugmaker's new Alzheimer's disease treatment. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said Tuesday after markets closed that patients taking Biogen's Aduhelm will have to also participate in clinical trials to assess the drug's effectiveness in order for Medicare to cover the cost. That's an important caveat because Medicare is expected to cover most of the patients who opt for Aduhelm, and the drug can cost as much as \$28,000 annually, not counting expenses for brain scans and other care patients will need while taking it. Biogen had cut that cost down from more than \$50,000 annually last month after taking months of criticism over the expense. The initial Medicare coverage decision will significantly limit access to Aduhelm, said Mizuho Se-



Associated Press

curities USA analyst Salim Syed. He had previously estimated around \$3.5 billion to \$4 billion in peak annual sales for the drug. But he said Wednesday he now assumes less than \$100 million. Medicare's national coverage determination will become final by April 11, following a public comment period and further evaluation by the agency.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration had approved Aduhelm last June and later said it was appropriate for patients with mild symptoms or early-stage Alzheimer's. Aduhelm clears brain plaque thought to play a role in Alzheimer's disease, and regulators made their call based on research showing the drug seemed

likely to benefit patients. But they've asked for another study. Biogen said last month that it would submit final plans for that study to the Food and Drug Administration in March. It then plans to have the first patient screened for the research by May. Researchers will aim to enroll about 1,300 people with

early-stage Alzheimer's and expect to complete the research about four years after the study begins. Aduhelm has been hailed as a promising treatment by some researchers because it has the potential to slow the fatal Alzheimer's. No drugs on the market currently do that. But concerns about the cost and effectiveness have slowed the drug's debut. Biogen CEO Michel Vounatsos said on Monday that the company now has about 220 sites treating patients with Aduhelm. Biogen said in June, shortly after the FDA approval, that about 900 sites in the U.S. have the equipment and expertise to immediately begin giving the drug, which requires monthly IVs. Shares of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Biogen Inc. fell more than 8%, or nearly \$21, to \$220.56 Wednesday morning while broader indexes rose slightly at the start of trading. The stock price had soared past \$400 after the FDA decision in June. □

Edmunds: Shopping for a car this year will not be the same

By **RONALD MONTROYA**
Edmunds

2021 was an unusual year for the automotive industry. While customer demand for new cars rebounded from the economic uncertainty of 2020, automakers found themselves unable to meet that demand because of semiconductor chip shortages and supply chain problems. So what should car shoppers expect for 2022? Much of the same, unfortunately. "Competition for new vehicles will be fierce as inventory shortages persist in 2022," said Ivan Drury, Edmunds' senior manager of insights for Edmunds. Shoppers today must contend with a limited selection, dealership markups, little to no discounts, and a greater sense of urgency to move quickly on a deal. With this in mind, here are

five ways that car buying has changed, along with a few tips on how to manage it. **ONGOING VEHICLE SHORTAGE MEANS HIGHER PRICES** Vehicles that make their way onto the lot are more likely to be in more expensive trims and either marked up in price or with numerous dealer-installed accessories that achieve the same effect. And if that wasn't enough to contend with, you'll find that dealerships are much less likely to come down on price since they know there aren't many other options available. It's a textbook case of supply and demand. These days, paying MSRP might actually be a "good deal," relatively speaking. Tip: We recommend casting your net out farther to increase your options. Not every dealership is mark-

ing up vehicles. If you see one you like, be prepared to move quickly because it may not be there the next time. **YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO ORDER YOUR NEXT CAR** One way to avoid the markups and dealer add-ons is to order the vehicle. This ensures that you get exactly the color and options that you want, provided you're willing to wait roughly six to eight weeks. The basic idea is that ordering a vehicle saves the dealership on lot fees and insurance for vehicles parked on- or off-site, and it can then pass the savings on to the consumer. The "savings" these days is paying MSRP and not being charged for dealer add-ons or the convenience of having a vehicle right away. Tip: The easiest way to or-



der a vehicle is to use an automaker's website to build the vehicle configuration you want and then send that information to your preferred dealership. **LEASING WILL BE LESS EN- TICING** Edmunds analysts say that leasing is becoming less popular for a couple of reasons. As inventories remain low and the cars that are in stock tend to be more loaded with options, they're less likely to be targeted by automakers' leasing programs because these vehicles typically suffer higher depreciation than their mid- to lower-level trim counterparts. Tip: You might need to do some extra planning and

research before your lease ends to find affordable options, said Drury. You can also consider buying out your lease, as it will likely be a better deal since the selling price for it was calculated years before the market took a turn. **USED VEHICLES MAY NOT OFFER RELIEF** Many new-vehicle shoppers turned to the used market for a better selection or respite from the higher new car prices. But this, in turn, caused its own shortage and record-high prices. Edmunds analysts predict that in the coming year, the average used vehicle price will surpass the \$30,000 mark for the first time. □

CROSSWORD

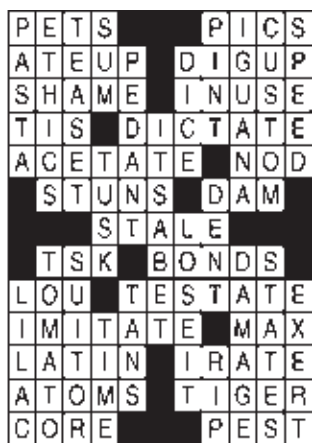
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Lumnox
- 5 Toledo setting
- 10 Own
- 11 Missouri motto
- 12 News article
- 13 Would-be lawyer's major
- 14 Metallic element
- 16 Metallic element
- 20 Astro-nomical sightings
- 23 Spanish gold
- 24 Stand
- 25 R2-D2, for one
- 27 Buddy
- 28 Dunne and Cara
- 29 Metallic element
- 32 Metallic element
- 36 Reeks
- 39 TV's warrior princess
- 40 Oxygen-dependent organism
- 41 Puts away
- 42 Smoothing tool
- 43 Set eyes on

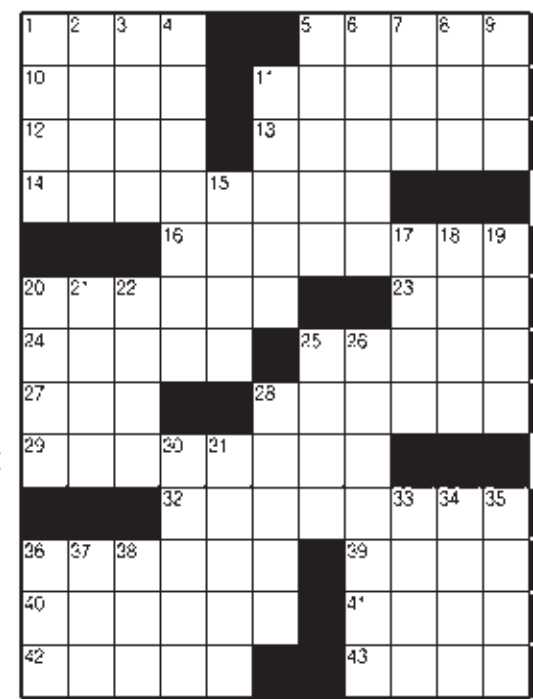
DOWN

- 1 Stylish
- 2 Wood strip
- 3 Finished
- 4 Lowers in rank
- 5 Show indifference
- 6 Frost creations
- 7 Piercing tool
- 8 "— Believer"
- 9 Fresh
- 11 Takes turns
- 15 Remote button
- 17 Animated character
- 18 War of 1812 port



Yesterday's answer

- 19 Tacit
- 20 Scout's base
- 21 Spoken
- 22 Layered mineral
- 25 Oil container
- 26 Dance versions
- 28 Busy
- 30 Eagle's claw
- 31 "You don't say!"
- 33 Tide type
- 34 "Do — others ..."
- 35 Ship staff
- 36 Easy victim
- 37 Baseball's Ott
- 38 History segment



AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-13

CRYPTOQUOTE

N KCMG ZNW BNW EGNJW ZIJG
DJIZ N DIIECMT SXGMVCIW
VTNW N DIIE BNW EGNJW
DJIZ N KCMG NWMKGJ.
— AJXBG EGG

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IF YOU ARE HONEST BECAUSE HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY, THEN YOUR HONESTY IS CORRUPT. — DR. ROBERT ANTHONY

Transcript gaps? Strong college application remains possible

By COLIN BERESFORD of NerdWallet undefined

Applying to college typically comes with some uncertainty, but this year's applicants are tackling one additional question: What should you do when a pandemic has limited what goes into your college applications?

Many extracurriculars, including sports and clubs, couldn't go on during the pandemic. And many school districts across the country, recognizing the challenges the pandemic has posed, offered the option for students to not receive letter grades for classes they took.

That choice has left some students with "pass" or "credit," or "fail" or "no credit," rather than actual grades on their transcripts. College admissions officers have been ready for these changes since before the current admissions cycle began, says David Hawkins, chief education and policy officer at the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

"Admissions officers clearly understand the challenges that these students have faced because they had the experiences themselves," Hawkins says. "They were locked down just as the students were."

SO WHAT ARE COLLEGES LOOKING FOR NOW?

As applications have changed, so has what admissions officers are looking for.

A transcript filled with "pass" or "credit" grades won't be counted against you, admissions officers say. What will be considered are the letter grades that are on your transcript, along with the classes you've taken, says Steve Robinson, senior associate vice president for enrollment management at the University of Utah.

"I think a lot of schools are looking at the academic rigor of what a student attempted," says Robinson. "In a rural high school, maybe there aren't as many (Advanced Placement) opportunities, or none, but what I can tell is that the student took everything possible that the high school offered academically they really tried, even if they (have pass grades)." As grading has changed, so have testing requirements. Even before the pandemic, colleges began to make submitting standardized test scores, such as from the ACT and SAT, optional. The practice spread to more schools due to the difficulties the pandemic has posed.

Extracurriculars also don't

look the same as they did pre-pandemic. Hawkins says that in some cases, how students spent their free time during the pandemic is taking the place of the extracurricular section of an application, at least in the eyes of admissions officers.

Some applications, including the Common App a standardized college application accepted at roughly 900 schools can offer space to write about your experience during the pandemic, such as hardships you faced or a new skill you learned.

"The other thing that I've heard from admissions officers is that they've been pleasantly surprised, and in some cases, amazed at what students continued to do even while in lockdown," Hawkins says.

YOUR BEST APPLICATION PLAYS TO YOUR STRENGTHS

With the option to complete certain essays or submit test scores, a strong application is one that best shows what you've accomplished. If you took the ACT or SAT and received a score that'll help bolster your application, send it to the college you're applying to. But if you didn't get a score you want to include with your application, don't include it, says Christine Harper, associate vice president for student success and chief enrollment officer at the University of Kentucky.

"We will use what benefits the student the most," Harper says. With some portion of applications now optional, students should look back at everything they've done and present the best version of themselves to a college, Harper adds.

Overall, the pandemic has forced college admissions officers to reevaluate their expectations of students, particularly since high school students had differing access to their usual activities, says Keri Risic, interim executive director of admissions at the University of Minnesota. □

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Studio WK #1 room # 3101
31 weeks remain \$7 K
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

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30 weeks remain \$ 9 K
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Price :\$8 K each
2 BR WK # 2,3,4 room # 3508
Price : \$18 K each
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HTTA

Eagle Resort
Eagle Beach
3 BR WK 5 and 6 room # 1550
Ground floor next pool
Price :\$ 20 K each
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HTTA

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Private Islands
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HTTA

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HTTA

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Associated Press

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer
SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP)

— Ran Carthon had been preparing to be an NFL general manager decades before he even got involved with an NFL team.

As a kid growing up, Carthon would talk with his NFL playing dad, Maurice, about the talent level of various players around the league, and took a big interest each year in the draft.

"I've always just been a fan of the draft, especially when I was younger," Carthon said. "I used to record every draft and buy all the draft magazines and follow along. I didn't realize what I was doing at the time. I was just more so trying to predict which team was going to take which player."

Carthon has come a long way from those days as a precocious draftnik, hav-

ing a successful college career as a running back in Florida to a brief stint in the NFL as Peyton Manning's teammate in Indianapolis to a post-playing career as a scout and personnel executive.

Carthon is in his fifth season as director of player personnel with the San Francisco 49ers after holding that same job for five years with the Rams, and hopes to be a candidate some day soon to run a team of his own.

There were five minority general managers this season among the 32 current teams, but Carthon is one of several minority executives in the pipeline hoping to get one of those coveted jobs some day soon. He is expected to interview for the New York Giants' opening this month.

"That's the goal in the grand scheme of things to

49ers executive Ran Carthon aims to run a team of his own

one day hold that position," Carthon said in an interview earlier this season. "It's kind of hard, because you got to keep the main thing the main thing, and just focus on doing what I can do to help make our club better and give us a chance to win each Sunday while maintaining the ultimate goal, which is to ultimately lead a team myself."

When Carthon's playing career was done following the 2006 season, he briefly took a shot at coaching high school in Miami on the advice of former Colts teammate Edgerin James. Carthon quickly realized his interests were more on the personnel side and he didn't have the patience to coach.

Carthon said his father had wanted to get involved in personnel after winning two Super Bowls with the Giants during an eight-year career as a bruising fullback in the NFL. But Bill Parcells talked Maurice Carthon into coaching, which he did for nearly two decades at various stops as a running backs coach, offensive coordinator and assistant head coach.

Maurice Carthon said he saw Ran going the person-

nel side and takes great pride in witnessing his success.

"I always felt like he was going to go that direction," Maurice Carthon said. "I've enjoyed watching him do that. I thought it was something that he really wanted to do and he got after it. I didn't have much to do with that. It's him and his want to."

Ran Carthon's front-office journey began with a four-year stint as a scout with the Atlanta Falcons before he joined the Rams, where he spent five seasons as director of pro personnel. Niners general manager John Lynch then brought him to San Francisco as director of pro personnel when the new regime arrived in 2017. Carthon is in his first season as director of personnel. He manages the pro scouting department, does advance scouting and helps the team make acquisitions through trades, free agency and the waiver wire.

Carthon said he has learned different aspects of the job from all three organizations he has been a part of but says the No. 1 thing he has learned in San Francisco is the importance

of the relationship between Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan.

"John and Kyle are aligned and have a clear vision of what they want from players at every position," Carthon said. "Then, now us as scouts, we can just go out and identify that. That's the big thing that I've learned probably the most. That's not to take away from any of the other organizations. Just having a clear line vision between the GM and his staff and the head coach and his staff. That allows us to have our marching orders and allows us to just go out and hunt for those players."

Carthon hopes to be giving out those marching orders some day. He was selected twice to participate in the NFL Career Development Symposium at the Wharton School of Business.

Carthon said watching mentors like Lynch and Les Snead of the Rams up close makes him appreciate how much goes into the GM job. While he feels prepared to do it, he said the only way to prove that is to get the job.

The first step will be getting a chance to interview for an opening. □

Klopp sure Salah will stay, have longevity of Messi, Ronaldo

LIVERPOOL, England (AP)

— Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp expects Mohamed Salah to sign a new contract with the club and have the same longevity in his career as Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Salah, who has 18 months left on his current deal, has been in talks with Liverpool about an extension but hasn't yet received what he deems an acceptable offer. He said in a recent interview with GQ magazine that he is not asking for "crazy stuff" and wants to be appreciated for all he has done for the club. Klopp said he was "very positive" about keeping hold of the Premier League's top scorer and that there's nothing unexpected about the length



Associated Press

of the current negotiations. "I know that Mo wants to stay. We want Mo to stay. That's where we are," Klopp said Wednesday. "These things take time. I cannot change it, sorry. I think it's all in a good place." The 29-year-old Salah has a claim to be the world's best player this season, having both scored more goals (16) and set up more goals (9) than any other player in the Premier League.

The Egypt winger, who is currently away on international duty at the African Cup of Nations, either won outright or shared the Golden Boot — the award for the league's top scorer — in two of his first four full seasons at Liverpool and is on course to win it again. □

Kentucky's Tshiebwe wants 'my name to be remembered forever'

By **MARK LONG**
AP Sports Writer

Kentucky's offense now runs through big man Oscar Tshiebwe.

Already leading the nation in rebounding, Tshiebwe (SHEE-bway) set career highs in scoring in consecutive games for the 18th-ranked Wildcats (13-3, 3-1 Southeastern Conference). He had 30 points and 13 rebounds in a lopsided victory at Vanderbilt on Tuesday night, three days after finishing with 29 points and 17 boards against Georgia. Back-to-back eye-openers should have Tshiebwe's NBA draft stock on the rise. "I wouldn't say I was surprised, but sometimes we've got to take the time

to appreciate what somebody really does," teammate and Keion Brooks said. "And Oscar has been tremendous for us all year and playing exceptionally well." A 22-year-old junior from the Congo, Tshiebwe began his college career at West Virginia. He left in the middle of his sophomore season for personal reasons and ended up transferring to Kentucky. Coach John Calipari believes Tshiebwe can give the Wildcats a post presence they missed last season.

Tshiebwe hopes to do way more. "I want my name to be remembered forever," he said. "Not just as a basketball player, the way I treat people, the stuff I'm

bringing to Kentucky basketball. I want my name to be remembered as Oscar who was different, not just a basketball player."

SIZE: 6-foot-9, 255 pounds. STATS: 17 points, 15.1 rebounds, 62.7% shooting, 72.5% free throws.

STRENGTHS: Tshiebwe is running the floor like never before and getting easy baskets in transition. While his hands seemed suspect early in the season, he's shown great touch around the rim in recent weeks – on both ends of the floor.

"We had a game a couple of games ago where he graded out, on his sprints, the worst he had all season," Calipari said. "So now, I'm focused on him running



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that floor. It puts him ahead of the action. He's going to get some easy ones. He's in a great position to rebound."

WEAKNESSES: For an athletic big man with a big body, Tshiebwe isn't much of a shot blocker. He hasn't had more than two in any game since early December and only has 23 in 466 minutes this season.

He also needs to continue

to develop his post skills and extend his range.

"Remember early in the year, he couldn't make 2-footers?" Calipari said. "Now, he's hitting jumpers and making free throws."

DRAFT PROJECTION: Once considered a second-round project, Tshiebwe is climbing draft boards and could end up being a mid-first-rounder by the time the draft arrives in July. □



Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The Orioles are moving the wall

Orioles moving LF fence back at Camden Yards

in left field back as much as 30 feet in an effort to make Oriole Park at Camden Yards a bit easier on pitchers. An Orioles spokesman confirmed the team's plans Wednesday, sharing an email sent to fans whose seats will be affected.

"For the start of the 2022 season, the distance from home plate to the left field wall will be pushed back

as much as 30 feet, in varying increments at different points in the wall, and the height will raise approximately 5 feet," the email said. "By pushing back the left field wall, we've created a playing field that is fair for both pitchers and hitters."

Baltimore hit 122 home runs at home last year and 73 on the road. Orioles pitch-

ers allowed 155 homers at home, compared to just 103 on the road.

"While Oriole Park will remain a hitter's ballpark, it will no longer be an outlier among the parks," the email to fans said.

Last year's dimensions at Camden Yards were 333 feet to left and 364 to left-center. The fence was 7 feet high. □

American skater Chen eyes elusive Olympic gold in Beijing

By **DAVE SKRETTA** AP Sports Writer

Nathan Chen has accomplished just about everything that one can accomplish in the sport of figure skating. Six consecutive national championships, the most since two-time Olympic champion Dick Button in the 1940s and '50s.

Three consecutive world championships, the best run by an American since Scott Hamilton in the early '80s.

Nearly four years with only a single defeat, a run that includes three consecutive wins at the Grand Prix Final. The only thing he's yet

to accomplish? Winning Olympic gold.

The 22-year-old Chen blew his chance four years ago in Pyeongchang, when an unusually poor short program cost him a chance at a medal; he rallied to finish fifth. But he's about to get another shot next month in Beijing, when Chen goes toe-to-toe with two-time defending gold medalist Yuzuru Hanyu and a stacked field at historic Capital Indoor Stadium.

"Every season my goal is to keep improving," Chen said after shattering his personal-best score at nationals last week. "I'm looking

forward to going back and working on whatever goals I have for the Games. I'm just enjoying this moment." The showdown between Chen and Hanyu will be the highlight of the entire Olympic program.

The American comes armed with an array of quadruple jumps that rival anyone in the world, while his artistry takes him beyond being just an athlete to being a bona fide performer. The biggest question surrounding Chen is what programs he'll unveil in Beijing — the programs he used with mixed results earlier in the season or the programs



Associated Press

he used at nationals, a short to "La Boheme" and an Elton John medley for his free skate that he used during the 2019-20 season. "I'm really happy with these programs," Chen said, giving credit to choreographer Shae-Lynn Bourne,

"and that's why it's awesome to be able to have such amazing choreographers consistently deliver great programs for me, so it's easy to be able to go back and look through all the work she's done with me." □



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